

# Competitive Exams: Political Science Study Material Child labour

## Child Labour

- The definition of child labour varies, but is usually means work done by children under the age of 15 which limits or damages their physical, mental social or psychological development. Some work does not harm children, and may in fact be beneficial for them. However, when we talk about child labour, we are referring to something intolerable-young people simply denied the right to be children.
- According to the census of India definition, a child worker is one who works for the major part of the day and is below the age of 14 years.
- There is no agreement about the definition of the 'child' The 1989 UN convention on the 'Rights of the Child' sets the upper age at 18. The International Labour Organisation refers to children as those who are under 15 years.
- In India, children above the age of 14 years are old enough to be employed.

## How Many Children Work?

- While it is difficult to get an accurate count because much child labour is hidden or denied by those who profit from it, a conservative estimate would indicate 250 million worldwide fall into our definition. Of them, 120 million work full time, at the expense of their education, health and development. The rest are said to be combining their employment with other commitments. If the kids don't work, won't their families starve?
- First, it is important to remember that children working in pitiable conditions rarely earn a living wage. Indeed, they are often hired because they earn so little. Sometimes they earn nothing at all, because they come as part of the package with their parents.

## Child Labour in India

- The 1981 census estimated 13.56m children in the workforce, constituting 7.58 per cent of the total child population below the age of 14 years and about 6 per cent of the total labour force in the country.
- According to an ILO survey in 1995, in India nearly 15 percent of the children are child labourers.

- Child labour makes a very significant contribution in arid and semi arid areas where families have to use maximum resources in traditional rain fed farming system for about 3 – 4 months during the rainy season. A lot of child labour is used in collection of goods viz. fuel, fodder, minor forest produce etc.
- In the 6 – 14 age group, the number of children out of school was 75m in 1981, of these 65m were rural girls.
- According to the provisional figures of Census 2001, out of the total child population of 252 million, 12.5 million children in the age group of 5 – 14 are working. This is slightly higher than the 11.8 million figure mentioned in the 1991 Census.
- Compared to many developing countries, the proportion of working children to the total labor force in India is low. It is 5.2 per cent of the total labor force as compared to 27.3 per cent in Turkey, 20.7 per cent in Thailand, 19.5 per cent in Bangladesh, 18.8 per cent in Brazil, 16.6 per cent in Pakistan, 12.4 per cent in Indonesia, 11.5 per cent in Mexico, 8.2 per cent in Egypt and 6.6 per cent in Argentina.

## Classification of Child Labour

Professor DP Choudhury of the University of Wollongong (Economics Department), Australia has classified working children in India into three categories. According to him.

1. The first category comprises of about 6 per cent of child laborers who work for wages full time in activities prohibited under anti-child labor laws.
2. The second category of working children constitutes around 14 per cent of child labourers who also work for wages but in activities not prohibited by law.
3. The majority of 80 per cent working children constitute the third category. They are partly or fully employed in family economic enterprises like farms, household industry and petty trades in which they and their parents work jointly.

## Nature of Child Labour

Bonded child labour. Bonded labour is one of the worst forms of labour not only for children but also for adults. In India, bonded labour has been illegal since 1976 when Parliament enacted the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act. However, the practice is still widespread. Most of the work carried out by bonded labourers is hard manual labour in the fields or brick kilns. They are, also, mostly the children of parents who belong to scheduled castes and tribes.

- The agricultural sector. In India, about 80 percent of child labourers are employed in agriculture and allied occupations. Child labour often assumes serious proportions in commercial agriculture that is associated with global markets for cocoa, coffee, cotton, rubber, sisal, tea etc.

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- Manufacturing. Most hazardous form of child labour in the manufacturing sector of India includes glass industry, match factories, carpet industry and lock industry.
- City street work. There are thousands of children who live and work in the city street of India. The majority of the street children are doing rag picking for their living. Thus, in India children do all kinds of activities. There is no product that has not been scented by the sweat of a child's labour.

## Causes of Child Labour

There are many socio-economic factors, responsible for the increase of child labour in India:

1. Poverty is undoubtedly a dominant factor. Families below the poverty line force their children into work to supplement their household's meager income. Though, children are not well paid, they still serve as major contributors to family income in developing countries. The combination of poverty and the lack of a social security network form the basis of the even harsher type of child labour-bonded child labour. For the poor, there are few sources of bank loans, credit sources etc. Here enters the local moneylender, for an average of two thousand rupees, parents exchange their child's labour to local moneylenders.
2. Schooling problems also contribute to child labour. Many a times children seek employment, simply because there is no access to schools. When there is access, the low quality of the education often makes attendance a waste of time for the students. Schools in many developing areas suffer from problems such as overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and apathetic teachers. A major reason that India has the largest child workforce is that 82 million children are not in school.
3. Big families: In most of the rural areas of India there are large families with limited options of income. These big families promote child labour for their livelihood.
4. Cheap and safe child labour: Due to industrialisation and modern scientific technology, the tendency among the employers is to have quicker and greater profits at low costs. Children are paid very low wages and subject to excessive hours of work. Child labour is not only cheap but safe also.
5. The other factors responsible for increasing the demand of child labour are:
  - a. Low profitability and productivity of small scale family enterprises that cannot afford adult paid labour and lack of law enforcement
  - b. Economic and political instability
  - c. Discrimination and migration
  - d. Traditional cultural practices

- e. Increasing landlessness that has led to dependence on wage and contractual employment
- f. Inadequate social protection
- g. Children are more pliant and can be moulded easily
- h. Children are trouble free and cannot organise agitation, Child labour is, thus, an outcome of economic and social related factors.

## Consequences of Child Labour

- Child labour does more than depriving children of their education, mental and physical development. Immature and inexperienced child labourers may be completely unaware of the short and long term risks involved in their work.
- Working for long hours, child labourers are often denied a basic school education, normal social interaction, personal development and emotional support from their family. Besides these problems, children face many physical dangers and death from forced labour.

## Government of India and Child Labour

1. According to Supreme Court 'Child is the Father of the Man'
2. The government of India set up a committee headed by Shri M S Gurupadaswamy in 1979 to inquire into the causes leading to and problems arising out of employment of children and to suggest suitable measures for their protection and welfare. The committee recognised that a distinction had to be drawn between child labour and its exploitation.
3. The government formulated the National Policy on child labour and announced the policy in Parliament in August 1987.
4. Nine projects were started in areas of high concentration of child labour in hazardous work.
  - Match, fireworks and explosives industry in Sivakasi in Virudhnagar district in Tamil Nadu
  - Precious stone polishing industry in Jaipur in Rajasthan
  - Glass and bangles industry in Ferozabad in UP
  - Brassware industry in Moradabad in UP
  - Handmade carpet industry in Mirzapur, Varanasi and Bhadoi in UP
  - Lock-making industry in Aligarh in UP
  - Tile industry in Jaggampet in AP
  - Slate industry in Markapur in AP

- Slate industry in Mandsaur in MP
5. Subsequently in 1994, National Child Labour Projects (NCLP) were launched in Sambalpur, Thane and Gharwa. A National Authority on Elimination of Child Labour was set up on 26 September 1994 under the chairmanship of the Union Minister of Labour and with representatives of the ten government departments relevant to the area of child labour, namely, Labour, Education, Welfare, Textile, Health, Family Welfare information and Broadcasting, women and child development, Rural Development, Expenditure etc.
  6. By 1995 – 96, seventy six NCLPs had been sanctioned including the 12 projects that had been sanctioned earlier. These have opened 1800 special schools under them with about 2500 teachers in which about 1.05 lakh children who had been released from hazardous industries/occupations/processes have been enrolled. Each school is to run a 3 years cycle. In the 1st two years, functional literacy is to be imparted to bring the children to a level of equivalence with the appropriate level/grade in the formal system of education while the 3 year is to be devoted to imparting vocational skill training to the children.

## Child Labour Elimination

1. There are problems with the obvious solution of abolishing child labour. There is no international agreement defining child labour. Countries not only have different minimum age work restrictions, but also have varying regulations based on the type of labour. This makes the limits of child labour very ambiguous. Until there is a global agreement which can isolate cases of child labour, it will be very hard to abolish.
2. Child labour cannot be eliminated by focusing on one determinant, for example education, or by brute enforcement of child labour laws. Some measures for child labour eradication are:
  - a. School represents the most important means of drawing children away from the labour market. School provides children with guidance and the opportunity to understand their role in society. Schools must make it worthwhile for children to attend in order to make up for lost earnings. One necessary provision is that these schools be free. Another possibility is that these schools serve food supplements. The quality of education can also be improved so that schooling is considered an important factor in the future success of a child.
  - b. Provide subsidies to poor families prone to having working children, so they can afford their children's schooling.
  - c. Establish partnership of international organisations dedicated to improving children's lives.
  - d. Social advocacy has a crucial long-term role to play in raising awareness about child labour. Trade unions, media and nongovernmental organisations have an important

function to identify and bring to public attention problems of child exploitation.

- e. Where intolerable categories of child labour have been identified, plans of action for elimination are needed, through an integrated strategy of prevention, regulation and rehabilitation.
  - f. Raising awareness in society as a whole about the impact of premature child work and by educating consumers to pay attention to basic labour rights when buying products.
3. Since child labour is a complex problem, a broad range of social sectors and issues other than education would also have to be covered under an effective joint strategy. These include health and poverty alleviation. The purpose of devising these additional social intervention strategies is to facilitate a convergence of services not only for the child workers but also for the family, community and for the overall socioeconomic and cultural environment.
4. It is an accepted fact that prevention is always better than cure. Therefore, emphasis should be on ensuring basic needs of the child as well as the family and the programs should aim at enhancing the skill and potential capacity of the family.

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